

Lyrics Analysis Worksheet

Handout 1

Step 1. Observation

A. Listen to the song. Form an overall impression of the song. Jot down or describe your overall feeling (e.g., sadness or joy). Next, examine individual lyrics. B. Use the chart below to list musicians, style, and lyrics in the song.

Musicians	Style	Lyrics

Step 2. Inference

Based on your analysis above, list three things you might infer from the song.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 3. Questions

A. What questions do these lyrics raise in your mind?

B. Where could you find the answers?

C. Why do you think this song was written?

D. What evidence in the song helps you know why it was written?
Quote from the lyrics.

E. List two things the song tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:

F. Write a question to the composer that is left unanswered by this song.

G. How might this song be useful to historians?

Teacher's note: An excellent source for songs of this time period is Smithsonian Folkway Recordings, 750 9th Street NW, Suite 4100, Washington, DC 20560-0953, www.Folkways.si.edu or www.Folklife.si.edu.

Handout 2

Musical Styles

In addition to the blues, there were several other musical styles that reflected life during the Great Depression: popular music, populism, and popular front. Students should compare and contrast the lyrics to these other styles to better understand the America of the 1930s.

Popular

Artist	Title	Sample Lyrics
Ella Fitzgerald	"It's Only a Paper Moon"	_____
David Franklin	"When My Dreamboat Comes Home"	_____
Cliff Friend	"The Merry Go Round Broke Down"	_____
Bing Crosby	"You Must Have Been a Beautiful Baby"	_____
Johnny Mercer	"Jeepers Creepers"	_____
Tom Gerun	"Cheerful Little Earful"	_____
Ira Gershwin	"Strike Up the Band"	_____

Populism

Artist	Title	Sample Lyrics
Carter Family	"Will the Circle Be Unbroken?"	_____
Jimmy Rogers	"The Singing Brakeman" or	_____
	"America's Blues Yodler"	_____
Emry Arthur	"I Am a Man of Constant Sorrow"	_____
Harry McClintock	"Big Rock Candy Mountain"	_____

Popular Front

Artist	Title	Sample Lyrics
Ralph Chaplin	"Solidarity Forever"	_____
Alfred Hayes	"I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill"	_____
Earl Robinson	"Red, White and Blue but Mostly Red"	_____
Florence Reese	"Which Side Are You On?"	_____
Woody Guthrie	"The Ballad of Pretty Boy Floyd" or	_____
	"Talkin' Dust Bowl Blues" or	_____
	"Hard Travelin'"	_____